CLAIMS:

1. A method for controlling the operation of a power train in a motor vehicle, wherein the power train comprises a spark-ignited combustion engine, a transmission operable by a transmission actuator and an automated clutch operable by a clutch actuating mechanism, the automated clutch being disposed in a torque transmitting path between the combustion engine and the transmission, the method comprising:

controlling the clutch actuating mechanism so as to open the clutch with the power train being in a pull mode of operation,

changing the transmission from a first gear position to a second gear position via a neutral position by moving the transmission actuator, wherein the transmission in the second gear position has a lower ratio than in the first gear position,

shifting an ignition angle of the combustion engine during the gear change step to cause the combustion engine to generate a negative engine torque, thereby decreasing engine speed when the transmission is disposed in the neutral position and enabling a desired engine torque to be rapidly realized as soon as the transmission actuator is disposed in the second gear position, and

controlling the clutch actuating mechanism so as to close the clutch.

2. A method as in claim 1, wherein the ignition angle is shifted such that a predetermined negative torque is supplied while the transmission is disposed in the neutral position and further comprising:

adjusting a torque control means of the combustion engine such that the predetermined torque is supplied by shifting the ignition angle.

3. A method as in claim 2, wherein the power train further comprises a control unit and further comprising:

moving the transmission actuator based upon signals generated by the control unit.

4. A method as in claim 1, wherein the power train further comprises a control unit and further comprising:

moving the transmission actuator based upon signals generated by the control unit.

5. An apparatus for controlling the operation of a power train in a motor vehicle, comprising:

a spark-ignited combustion engine,

a transmission operable by a transmission actuator,

an automated clutch operable by a clutch actuating mechanism, the automated clutch being disposed in a torque transmitting path between the combustion engine and the transmission,

means for controlling the clutch actuating mechanism so as to open and close the clutch with the power train being in a pull mode of operation,

means for changing the transmission from a first gear position to a second gear position via a neutral position by moving the transmission actuator, wherein the transmission in the second gear position has a lower ratio than in the first gear position, and

means for shifting an ignition angle of the combustion engine during the gear change step to cause the combustion engine to generate a negative engine torque, thereby decreasing engine speed when the transmission is disposed in the neutral position and enabling a desired engine torque to be rapidly realized as soon as the transmission actuator is disposed in the second gear position.

6. An apparatus as in claim 5, wherein shifting means causes the ignition angle to be shifted such that a predetermined negative torque is supplied while the transmission is disposed in the neutral position and further comprising:

an adjustable torque control means for supplying the predetermined torque from the combustion engine by shifting the ignition angle.

7. An apparatus as in claim 6, wherein the power train further comprises a control unit in communication with the transmission actuator and being arranged and constructed to generate signals for causing the transmission actuator to move.

8. An apparatus as in claim 5, wherein the power train further comprises a control unit in communication with the transmission actuator and being arranged and constructed to generate signals for causing the transmission actuator to move.